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ABSTRACT

This study is a qualitative analysis and critique of the way culture is conceptualized in a collection of teacher educators' stories of their personal experiences with cultural differences and their characterizations of multicultural education. The interpretive practices revealed in their writings suggest that they hold the concept of culture that predominates in the United States, that of a bounded entity belonging to groups and individuals. Teacher educators suggest that conflicts caused by differences among cultures are inevitable, but they argue that emphasizing their commonalities rather than their differences can moderate the tension. The researchers suggest ways of using ethnography as a teaching tool to illustrate the concept of culture as interpretive practice. First, ethnographies allow teachers and students to see how culture is lived as people make and remake their worlds. Second, reading ethnographies helps people uncover presuppositions such as those examined in this paper. (Contains 47 references.) (Author/SM)

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The Concept of Culture in Multicultural Education: Views of Teacher Educators in the USA

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The Catholic University of America

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The Concept of Culture in Multicultural Education:

Views of Teacher Educators in the USA

Abstract

This study is an qualitative analysis and critique of the way culture is conceptualized in a collection of teacher educators' stories of their personal experiences with cultural differences and their characterizations of multicultural education. The interpretive practices revealed in their writings suggest that they hold the concept of culture that predominates in the U.S., that of a bounded entity belonging to groups and individuals. Teacher educators suggest that conflicts caused by differences among cultures are inevitable, but they argue that emphasizing their commonalties rather than their differences can moderate the tension. We suggest ways of using ethnography as a teaching tool to illustrate the concept of culture as interpretive practice. First, ethnographies allow teachers and students to see how culture is lived as people make and remake their worlds. Second, reading ethnographies helps people uncover presuppositions such as those that we examine in this paper.

The Concept of Culture in Multicultural Education:

Views of Teacher Educators in the USA

Introduction

Multicultural education, a hotly contested term since the 1980's in the USA and elsewhere, revolves around competing conceptions of culture and the struggle for the power to define the term. In the United States, it began as part of the civil rights movement of the 1960's, taking the form of in-service training for teachers in recently desegregated schools. Advocates argued for a reduction in racism, prejudice, and discrimination as part of a commitment to social justice (Ramsey, Vold, & Williams, 1989). By the 1970's, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education's (NCATE) revised standards mandated a multicultural perspective for all teacher education programs (NCATE, 1977).

In the 1990's, critics voiced concern over how little teacher education programs had changed teachers' attitudes about social justice in schools and society (Zeichner, 1993). Writers criticized the lack of information for prospective teachers on the sociopolitical context of multicultural education (Nieto, 1992). Some lamented the few opportunities teachers had to work with students in culturally responsive (Cazden & Legett, 1981; Irvine, 1992), or culturally relevant ways (Ladson-Billings, 1992). Others suggested that multicultural education include helping teachers to learn how to define themselves in terms of their own racial identities (Tatum, 1992; 1997).

Past research on prevailing interpretations of culture suggests that many people view it as unchanging, fixed characteristics of groups or individuals (Chock, 1995;

Handler, 1988; Segal & Handler, 1995; Rosaldo, 1992; Wax, 1993). In this view, culture is an "elemental, internally homogeneous and self-evident" unit (Segal & Handler 1995, p. 396). All members of a group are presumed to share it, and what is outside a culture's boundary differs from what is inside it. According to the prevailing view, individuals as well as groups may also possess a personal cultural identity that they can add to or subtract from (Hoffman, 1996; Urciuoli, 1994;Varenne, 1977). The dominant view of cultural diversity is that it is a collection of cultures that share the same space or society. Furthermore, because cultures shape people differently, conflict is a natural outcome of cultural difference (Handler, 1988).

Our understanding of culture, held by some anthropologists (Turner, 1993; Hoffman, 1996), is that it is comprised of interpretive practices by which humans actively construct social worlds and their surroundings. What a "culture" is depends on the frames and purposes of those who make such claims. The meanings of "culture" are unstable because, through their practical and ritual performances, social actors continuously create, contest, negotiate, or reproduce meanings in particular social scenes. This definition emphasizes the purposive nature of the term. It highlights the changing and interpretive rather than fixed boundaries of social groups and individuals. The term "cultural diversity" can be thought of in the same interpretive sense, that is, diversity exists where and when people make claims for cultural differences.

One of us, a faculty member in an Education Department, and the other, a faculty member in a Department of Anthropology decided to apply an anthropological analysis of the way culture is conceptualized in a published collection of teacher educators' personal profiles and descriptions of multicultural teacher education programs. The

Education department author had contributed an entry to the collection we analyzed. We wanted to understand how the people who are most committed to changes in teacher education conceptualize culture and cultural diversity and to see if their concepts matched the predominant interpretation of the term.

Method

We did not do fieldwork in the usual sense and so we did not observe these assumptions about culture being put into practice in the classroom or in face to face conversation. But we did observe them being used in a practice which constitutes teacher educators' professional lives and goals in important ways, namely writing and publication. We approach the entries in the book, therefore, as cultural texts that deserve serious ethnographic consideration. They are documents that the writers have composed with care, thought, and deliberation, and through them, the writers address audiences of other teacher educators who, like themselves, are committed to goals of multicultural education. The documents are thus parts of a conversation among those who are both committed and expert in multicultural education.

Sample

We analyzed a national sample of multicultural and global teacher education programs from public and private colleges and universities and views of multicultural education by teacher educators associated with these institutions that were compiled in a book entitled *Making Connections Between Global and Multicultural Education* (Merryfield, 1996). Entries to the collection were responses to a letter from the editor to 227 nominees from among American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) member institutions and other organizations involved in multicultural and

education program descriptions from 32 states in the USA. Four institutions in Canada were omitted from the study. Specific questions were 1) "What is multicultural education? What is global education? How are multicultural and global education related? What ideas, concepts or goals do they share?" 2) "Within your program, what are ways in which teacher educators make connections between the fields of multicultural education and global education?" 3) "What are your lessons learned that can help other teacher educators?" And, 4) "What materials, ideas, or services are teacher educators in the program willing to share with others? What other special strengths does your program have in multicultural or global education that would inform or be of interest to other teacher educators?" (Merryfield, 1996, p. 257). Often the same people whose individual profiles appeared in the first section wrote the second section for their institution.

Procedure

We identified some of the teacher educators' interpretive practices, their unstated presuppositions, and the contradictions entailed by these practices that emerged from the personal profiles, program descriptions, and policy statement. Some contributors to the book emphasized views similar to our own social constructivist views, when they said, for example, that culture is a way to define and construct knowledge and practices (p.239). But most teacher educators appeared to characterize culture and diversity in ways that matched the predominant view of these terms. They wrote about "a" culture as an entity, possessed by groups and individuals. They characterized cultural diversity as the intersection of several bounded entities. They implied that it is increasing with time, creating inevitable dissension. They argued that emphasizing the features that all cultures

have in common could moderate conflict, in promoting human relations training, and in recognizing that some people use multicultural education for improper ends. We discuss the educational implications of these views and suggest that helping teachers and their students learn to examine critically their own interpretive practices may help them uncover presuppositions about these terms in ways that will reshape the discussion of culture and diversity in education.

Data Analysis

For our analysis of the texts, three coders (the two authors and a graduate assistant) first searched the entries in the *Making Connections* volume for key words, such as "culture" and "diversity." Then we recorded possessives ("our" or "my") and other frequently occurring terms such as "identity," and "group," when they appeared in phrases near these key words. We then compiled lists of phrases such as "my culture," "our culture," "cultural group," and "cultural identity." By these steps, we removed the terms from much of their context of use, "decontextualizing" them from their natural settings (the texts). We did this to make terms that otherwise appear familiar and self-evident to us as "natives" in the society we are studying, to be more distanced and open to examination (cf. Chock, 1986). This step was also necessary because these terms ("culture" and "diversity") are implicated in US nationalism discourses (Handler, 1988); we wanted those implications to be called into question as interpretive claims rather than to be taken for granted. We then compiled lists of the phrases by key word, compared key terms and propositions within and among the sources, and stated implicit themes of these lists as propositions. One such list, for example, included:

Culture is identity

One's own identity

My people/all people

Cultural identity essay

Teachers must be secure in their own cultural identity

One's cultural/linguistic identity can be lost

We also examined some of the aspects of a speech event to which Hymes (1972) refers: Participants (writers, their audiences), Settings (academic institutions, debates about multicultural education and its praxis, as well as the cultural document in which the essays were assembled), Ends (stipulation of terms, persuasion, expressiveness, explicit and implicit agendas), Code (verbal terms and their relations); and Key (the "tone, manner, or spirit" in which something is said which draws attention to, deflects attention away from non-literal meanings, or shifts frames of understanding). Using this procedure we found several general themes in the way these teacher educators characterized culture and diversity.

Results

Interpretation 1: Culture as an Entity

In the views of most teacher educators, "a" culture is an entity, a whole thing in itself: it has a boundary that separates it from other cultures. For instance, one teacher educator wrote,

> The term 'multicultural' as used here refers broadly to the many cultural groups within our nation and our world: racial, ethnic, regional, religious, language and socioeconomic groups, as well as males and females, the young and old, persons

> with different sexual orientations, and persons with differing and varied abilities (p. 102).

Another writer noted, "A basic tenet of multicultural education is that there is value in learning about, accepting, and appreciating diversity of folkways, mores, customs, traditions, skills, and ways of living. (p. 62). A third entry noted that "...educators are obliged to make connections across cultural and national boundaries" (p.114). This passage suggests that cultures, like nations, have "boundaries" that do not overlap or blend into one another although these boundaries can be crossed.

Culture is also understood to be made up of a unique assortment of things, for example, artifacts that can be assembled by into "culture kits (p.78), gathered on "cultural scavenger hunts" in different ethnic communities (p.48) or collected by "professors during their travels, teaching and homestays" (p.89). Other writers referred to forms of respect behavior or child-rearing (p.53), styles of learning and speaking, and individual, social, and sexual roles (pp.85, 126, 195). Yet other teacher educators referred to culture as "achievements" ("the roots of contemporary cultural achievements, such as architecture, agriculture[,] literature, and the arts" (p.73).

Another way to think about culture-as-entity is to characterize psychological states as entities that someone can acquire or remove from their identity (See the Culture as Possession section for more about this issue). Many of these teacher educators characterize the achievement of multiple perspectives as acquiring pieces of a culture. They frequently talked about culture as knowledge, worldview, perspective, or ways of knowing (pp.103, 108,110-111). For example, one writer defined culture subjectively, "including patterns of verbal and nonverbal behavior, communication style, and values

maintained by groups of interacting people" (p.195). Common objectives for multicultural education courses were to help students achieve multiple perspectives (pp.4, 39, 110) and "perspective consciousness" (p.131) through simulations, role playing exercises (p.8), interactive cooperative assignments, collaborative problem solving activities (p.66), and cross cultural experiences (p.177). While writers of these statements seem to be suggesting that cultures are effects of human understanding and action, as we do, they also seem to be maintaining that these effects are entities that can be acquired by individuals with practice and specific experiences.

Some contributors to the volume used both an approach that resembles ours, and another one that assumes cultural entities. A teacher educator, for example, invoked the first, saying, "...I emphasize the cultural dimension of learning, teaching, and research -- ways of knowing" (p.108) by suggesting that a way of viewing can be learned. She also invoked the culture-as-thing meaning when she wrote, "I argued for the integration of diverse cultural knowledge in math and science as well as literature and history..." (p.109) by suggesting that culture is a content that can be "integrated" into some other subject matter. The editor of the volume juxtaposes the two characterizations:

> ...related to cross-cultural experiences is the teaching of multiple perspectives to understand differences within and across cultures, the social construction of worldviews and perspective taking, and the complexity of the human experience over time and space (pp.4, 5).

Analysis: The Difficulty with Defining Culture as Entity.

The process of interpreting cultures as things or as made up of things such as customs or psychological states made these constructions appear to be self-evident and natural for these teacher educators. Cultures were characterized as coherent wholes, but

needing constant attention and reiteration to maintain this "wholeness." These are elements of the common "two worlds" image of cultural difference in which each "world" is a simple, self-contained unit. (See Henze & Vanett [1993] for educational examples). These uniform features characterize both a "totemic" logic described by Levi-Strauss (1966) and "pluralist" thought in the U.S. (see Chock, 1989). The outcome of such uses of culture in the sense of an entity is that it misses the sense of culture as interpretive, constructed, and contingent, unlike our own view and the culture-as-perspective view of some of the teacher educators.

Interpretation 2: Culture as Possession

Cultures Belong to Groups.

In many of the entries teacher educators spoke of culture as something to be possessed. In some cases they discussed culture as though it were a group possession. Program descriptions, personal profiles, and the policy statement often described culture in the context of multicultural education as a group possession, characterized for instance, as "the community and its cultures." One person wrote, "Knowledge of the community and its cultures is necessary for generating the examples and metaphors essential to making difficult subject matter relevant and understandable to students" (p.47). Ethnic groups were the most frequently noted "cultural groups" in these entries, so Hispanic/Latino-Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans, and Native Americans have "Latino, African, Asian, and Native cultures" on which programs focus (p.47). Teacher educators also mentioned that "South/East Asians," (white) "Appalachians," or "African-Brazilians" have cultures (p.116). So do people of different

religious groups, genders, ages, physical (dis)abilities, sexual orientations, and lifestyles (pp.100, 195).

Some teacher educators noted that not all groups view themselves as having a culture. One person wrote, "It is rightfully assumed that teachers from the majority culture have a harder time in this process [of understanding their own stories and cultural backgrounds] because 'white' culture is not always seen as a 'culture,' but it is (p.126)."

Many of the personal profiles also described how people had been separated from or excluded by specific groups. Teacher educators claimed that insights gained from these incidents provided the motivation to study multicultural education. Profiles included stories about being targets of racist attacks (p.36), assigned a low status (p.60), labeled as a foreigner (p.125), or just viewed as different (p.161). One person wrote of a childhood experience:

> My sisters and I were the only Asians in our small Catholic grade school of 300 children. Since the Catholic school ended at the eighth grade, I transferred to a public junior high for ninth grade. I remember getting on the school bus and someone saying they did not want to sit next to a Jap. The racism was extremely overt and covert in the small farming community. ... I did not have a group that I could feel I belonged to when racist remarks were made. I often felt isolated and alone. I believe this is one of the reasons why I developed a strong interest in multi-cultural education (p.36).

In these citations, cultures are described with distinctive and discrete characteristics of well-defined social groups. For one teacher educator, the coexistence

of these groups obliges teachers "to teach for understanding" by making "connections across cultural and national boundaries in order to draw them together" (p.114).

Culture Belongs to Individuals.

In other cases, teacher educators described culture as an individual possession and an important aspect of a person's "identity." These authors described class assignments that asked students to describe their cultural identity in order to "discover one's own culture, socialization, and background":

> To function as a culturally responsible educator, a person must first begin the journey to "know thyself." While these may be and often are, simultaneous, lifelong journeys, one cannot understand other cultures without first investing considerable effort to discover one's own culture, socialization, and background (p.103).

The personal profiles depict teacher educators' lives as full of lifelong learning and personal growth. Many writers stated that their aim was to foster the same growth in their students, toward "each learner's potential to achieve" (p.58). One person wrote:

> My early childhood was spent in the Bronx in New York City, where I was raised in a multiethnic (Spanish, Cuban, Italian), multilingual (Italian, Spanish, English) close-knit, extended family. At age 15, we moved to a nearby suburb, where I first learned I was "different," especially from a guidance counselor who assumed I was a below-average student (I was an honors student) and directed me to not apply to college ("people like me didn't go to college"). After enrolling in a community college, winning scholarships and graduating magna cum laude from a four-year state

> university at the age of 20, I pursued graduate studies in education, bilingualism, and multiculturalism. I decided to dedicate my professional life to ensure that no other student ever endured the humiliation and discouragement that I did, for no other reason than "being who I am" (p.161).

Another writer clearly located cultures within the individual. He noted, "...polycentrism takes us from that which we know best--our own way of looking at the world--into the realm of human diversity where people stand from different centers looking out" (p.125).

Several teacher educators described activities aimed at helping students create an identity, to reflect on the question "what about me?" (p.125), to see themselves as members of several groups (p.159), to grow personally (p.106), and to be transformed through self-validation (p.125). According to these entries, self-defining experiences helped people improve interpersonal and communication skills and resulted in greater interpersonal sensitivity and empathy (pp.3, 9, 55, 118, 225). For these teacher educators, a personal cultural identity provided the possibility of self-validation, personal growth, and greater cultural consciousness.

Some of the teacher educators claimed to be "multicultural" persons. This claim assumes that the person had been able to unify what otherwise would have been a fuzzy or fractured identity. Writers were less clear on whether students also are multicultural or whether they can become so only with the help of a teacher or a school.

Analysis: The Difficulty with Defining Culture as a Possession.

One difficulty with defining culture as either a group or an individual possession is that the definition assumes that groups, individuals, and cultures have clear boundaries. Only then can the boundaries of culture and individual, on the one hand, or culture and

group, on the other, coincide. One group can then be seen as having one culture (except for the USA, which is sometimes said to be "multicultural" but is unified by the nation), and one individual may be seen to have one culture (except for the "multicultural" individual who unifies disparate cultures). Overlapping, indistinct, or fuzzy boundaries would make it impossible for a group or individual to claim possession of "a" culture, while groups or individuals without clear boundaries would not be able to possess anything.

The idea that culture is a distinctive group or individual possession implies that, in principle, there can be as many cultures as there are groups and individuals (See Varenne [1977,] for example, on the mutual implication of "individual" and "community" in the U.S.) This approach to defining cultures, groups, and individuals by their unique characteristics means that the list of cultures could be expanded indefinitely. According to this logic, the number of cultures an individual or group can possess is limited only by one's imagination or categorization needs. If there are an indefinite number of cultures, teachers will have difficulty managing culturally diverse classrooms and implementing a multicultural curriculum. In addition, because individuals can add cultural aspects to their identities at any time, the possibility of finding or creating a complete person becomes remote. This logic requires teachers to enlist students on a lifelong search for their cultural identities. Even though some contributors noted that adding a course or reading assignment about each identified cultural group was an unacceptable approach to multicultural education, the logic of discrete cultures lends itself to an emphasis on lists of cultural groups distinguished by particular cultural differences.

By defining culture as a collection of things possessed by individuals, writers make teachers free to mix and match (to choose) cultural products, to make new or to complete old cultural identities, and to help their students do the same. One difficulty with this logic is that it attributes individuals' successes or failures to their personal choices rather than to complex social and cultural processes (Urciuoli, 1994). As a consequence, teacher educators' phrasings of the issue suggest that teachers need to use culture as therapy in order to revalidate their own and their students' identities whether the notion of identities of unique individuals is salient to particular groups or not (cf. Hoffman, 1996; Wetherell & Potter, 1992).

Interpretation 3: Positive and Negative Visions of Cultural Difference

Comments by teacher educators and policy makers suggest to us an underlying anxiety about social change in the United States. The focus of this concern, whether stated or implied, is the "nation": can it survive cultural diversity? Many writers suggested that cultural diversity is a recent problem in the US and hinted that it has increased over time, causing "intense social change" (p.141). They alluded to a belief that an earlier historical period existed when communities were more homogeneous and less stressed than today. One teacher educator attributed increasing diversity to what she saw as an accelerating possibility for conflict in the future: "We live in a global society, unified by interrelated economic activity, threatened by interrelated environmental activity, and fragmented by political unrest" (p.95). Other contributors proposed the reverse of the evolutionary argument, that is, cultural diversity was greater in the past than in the present or than it will be in the future. This argument is based on the same kind of evolutionary notion as the idea that primitives (who live in the past) have

cultures, but we (moderns) don't, or that non-whites have cultures, but whites do not (cf. Chock, 1995). Both of the evolutionary versions assume that diversity exists and both positions displace its destruction or enhancement either into the past or into the future.

Individuals argued that diversity is necessary and beneficial (p.143), as well as enriching (p.145) in the profile sections of their contributed essays. Another said, "...differences among students should be acknowledged and celebrated and seen as reasons for possibility rather than limitation" (p.114). References to the policy statement on multicultural education also argued that diversity is a source of strength and enrichment (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 1996). A program description noted: "Multicultural education is based on the belief that cultural pluralism is a valuable resource for America and educational experiences should aim toward preserving and enhancing cultural diversity" (p. 62).

Several entries hinted that many people misunderstand multicultural education and this misunderstanding is keeping it from becoming a positive force. In this view, conflicts arise not from the existence of many cultures, but rather from the way individuals and institutions misuse differences. Some of these accounts pointed to politics, personalities, and misinterpretation as the root causes of controversies about cultural diversity. One person wrote, "Many whites and minority teachers I have worked with do not see MCE as a common agenda for school change, but rather a political and personal agenda that does little to improve the lot and learning of minority children" (p.223).

Some teacher educators emphasized human relations training as a way to make cultural diversity more positive. The implication in their argument is that people can

transcend cultural differences, or at least go back and forth among cultures easily: "Education and training in intercultural communication can improve competence in dealing with cultural difference and thereby minimize destructive conflict among national, ethnic, and other cultural groups" (p.191).

While positive visions of diversity dominated the entries, some writers reflected a negative perspective. The educational policy document characterized intercultural tensions as natural and unavoidable, and a teacher educator noted, "By definition, different cultures conflict as they shape people's behaviors and beliefs differently" (p.16).

In characterizing cultural diversity, most writers concentrated on similarities among cultures, while a few focused on the differences. Some contributors claimed that the differences among cultures were superficial compared with underlying similarities among humans everywhere. These teacher educators suggested that multicultural education programs are similar for different groups, pointing to the commonality of "the same" problems and solutions for all groups. As one writer put it, there is always "another minority" culture, but problems and solutions in schooling are the same (p.214). Another author pointed to similar problems of injustice, bigotry, and prejudice in all cultures (p.197). Entries suggested that tensions could be resolved by recognizing similarities beneath all the diversity. In this view, every culture contains the same kinds of things; it is only particular things that are different.

Another way to emphasize similarities among cultures was to mute individual differences and emphasize not the subcultures, but the national identity. One person wrote that people need to "recognize and claim our own cultures at many levels

particularly if we are from the United States, where people tend to think of themselves as individuals rather than members of a national culture" (p.192).

Explicit and implicit in these statements about culture is the understanding that "the United States has a culture too" (p.122) that unifies diverse groups into one stable entity, the nation. Teacher educators claimed that "contemporary American culture" (p.114) is the result of "people from many different nations coming here to settle. It has been a strength to America..." (p.121). Some authors attributed the multicultural character of the United States to worldwide migration. One wrote, "many communities in the United States have experienced an influx of re[f]ugees from Asia, the war-torn Balkans, Kurdistan, and former Eastern-bloc European nations" who have "diverse cultural backgrounds" (p.133). For these contributors, the national culture is a collection of distinct subcultures: "America is a nation where each culture retains its identity while contributing to the whole" (p.80).

Some entries noted that different cultures were equivalent in many ways. For example, one writer proposed that cultural differences could be treated as essentially the same because each is a subculture belonging to the same American culture (p.118). Other teacher educators noted similarities across cultures in their celebrations or in folktales, or more generally in the categories of race, class, and gender. As one writer described her teaching goal, "I try to develop an appreciation for unity in diversity in the classes I teach" (p.121). Another teacher educator noted, "Understanding the similarities of people where ever [sic] they live unifies us..." (p.77). This statement assumes that all differences are essentially alike. They are just instances of "diversity," and consequently they can be incorporated into a single "unity."

One teacher educator noted: "Multicultural education is misunderstood and misconceived as a process that is dividing a united nation, but it is purposely addressing the unity of a deeply divided nation." (p.163). Another noted, "the world is really just one country and we all are citizens of that country" (p.121). So prominent was this theme that the editor summarized it at the beginning of the book: "**People share the same human problems, the same human condition, the same desires for a more just, equitable, and peaceful world**" (p.2, emphasis in original). Many entries noted commonalties across cultures. But stressing commonalties allows one to overlook or to downplay historical, social, or geographical differences and to address instead the ever-expanding list of cultures to be celebrated.

Analysis: The Difficulty with Positive and Negative Visions of Cultural Differences.

The multicultural argument conceives of the existence of many cultures, each of which is a separate unit. The positive vision focuses on enhancing lives and helping cultures to endure. Proponents of this view celebrate (or at least claim to appreciate) all cultures as though they were one. Similarly, the negative vision of cultural diversity is that it leads to destruction or disintegration of cultures. But people who hold both positive and negative visions assume that a natural consequence of culturally diverse communities is controversy, conflict and dissension, because diverse cultures are assumed to shape people's behaviors and beliefs differently. The dominant characterization of cultural diversity in the US makes this same assumption (Handler, 1988).

The focus of the positive vision of cultural diversity on the possibility of conflict assumes that the friction arising from diversity can be managed, contained, or directed in positive ways, such as composing or celebrating an agenda of change. The focus of the negative vision is on destructive strife that is unconstrained and unmanageable and that can be diverted to personal or political misuse. The implicit assumption in both of these visions is that there could be or have been homogeneous cultures with no friction. This assumption is part of what Carol Greenhouse has called a "pastoral myth" of an authentic, homogeneous community (1996, p.232).

Discussion

Taken together, these author profiles, program descriptions, and policy statement suggest several distinct interpretations of culture and diversity. The dominant construction of culture is as a uniform, bounded unit. This conception presupposes that the number of "culture units" can be limitless since these units can belong to individuals or to groups. Several units (cultures), when sharing the same space or society create cultural diversity and controversy. Conflicts caused by differences among these units (cultures) are inevitable, but emphasizing their commonalties rather than their differences can moderate the dissention.

Teachers and students often define themselves and others in terms of fixed racial identities, and they are frequently uncomfortable talking about these beliefs or the racism that accompanies them (Tatum, 1992). Programs that help teachers and students acknowledge their uses of these categories may be an important first step toward exploring the pervasive influence of these terms (Tatum, 1997).

Our approach is to adopt the idea of culture not as something requiring uniform features, fixed relationships, specific divisions of groups, or pre-selected characteristics of individuals, but as interpretive practices through which social groupings make and remake themselves and their worlds (Turner, 1993). This concept of culture leads us to explore the metaphors that are embedded in and shape the debate about multicultural education. In earlier attempts to conceptualize how to prepare teachers to work in diverse classrooms, Grant (1991) suggested that the best way to prepare teachers is first to help them understand their own histories, often through the use of personal narratives such as the ones included in the *Making Connections* book.

We argue for another approach; that is, to help prospective teachers become more analytical in the way they reason about terms like culture and diversity. We maintain that they need to pay attention to their own interpretive practices. Some contributors to the *Making Connections* volume, and others (Foster, 1989; Henze & Vanett, 1993; Hoffman 1996; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Osborne, 1996; Patthey-Chavez, 1993), have also recommended this approach. One way to help people think about culture as interpretive practices is to ask them to deconstruct the words associated with the multicultural education debate, as we did here, and to read articles of authors that have attempted to do so. These words could include terms like "identity" and the notion that it is a cultural universal (Handler, 1994; Hoffman, 1996), or "gender"(Barnes, 1994; Nanda, 1990) and "race" (Banks, 1995; Gregory, 1993; Wade, 1993) and the idea that these terms are biologically determined. Teachers could also extend the investigation of cultural interpretations to terms that are fundamental to school subjects but not directly connected to the multicultural education debate. A contributor to *Making Connections* suggested

that teachers ask students to investigate what it means to be "literate" in literature courses, or what it means to have a "healthy" "body" in courses on health and physical education (p.239). (See also Martin [1994] on changing concepts of the body in the USA.) The advantage of this approach is that these terms are often not as politically charged as those in the multicultural education debate and it may thus be easier for students to uncover their own biases regarding them

Using an ethnographic approach can also be helpful, since when it is well done, it helps one see how culture is lived as people make and remake their worlds. We suggest that teacher educators first introduce readers to a wide variety of ethnographies. Their aim would be to help students learn how other people living other lives interpret their worlds, that is, to make distant ways of life familiar to students. A second purpose would be to help students learn how their own interpretive practices influence their judgements about other people by making familiar ways of life unfamiliar and therefore subject to more informed criticism (Geertz, 1983; Segal & Handler, 1995). Preservice teachers could be asked to read ethnographies about communities where their future students live that reveal multiple ways of interacting inside of schools (Patthey-Chavez, 1993) and outside of national and institutional boundaries (Urciuoli, 1996; Yanagisako, 1995; Zentella, 1997). Autobiographies and case studies of teachers can also point out the importance of keeping the issues situated in particular contexts (Foster, 1989; Lipka, 1991; Hornberger, 1990). With guidance, teachers can be urged to become ethnographers themselves, for example by selecting multiethnic literature for their students, reading it to them, and analyzing their own and their students' reactions (Broaddus, 1998).

Meanings of social differences such as class, race, gender, nationality, identity, and ethnic group are powerful, yet unstable in the multicultural education debate. Examining the language, the interpretive practices and preconceptions that underlie these terms is an essential element in reshaping the discussion and revising classroom practices.

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